CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis primarily has been to examine the way in which fictionists of the Indian Subcontinent have chosen to portray the conflicts that define their reality. A close study of the authors suggests that the novels depict conflict in its various manifestations. South Asia has always been one of the most troubled regions of the world, with most countries that comprise it having intractable conflict situations raging in their countries, till very recently in the past. The violence of partition, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, civil war in Afghanistan, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, global acts of terrorism are some instances of overt conflict that preoccupies the writers of the Indian Subcontinent.

Conflict in terms of war and aggression is a theme that is common in many of the novelists from all the countries. The writers from Sri Lanka, Romesh Gunesekera and Shyam Selvadurai have depicted the trauma of the long and unrelenting civil war in their country. Ethnic tension during the drafting of the Donoughmore Commission in Sri Lanka is a constant presence in Cinnamon Gardens. The insecurity among the Tamils regarding the “Sinhala Only” policy and Sinhala chauvinism, and the ethnic riots alluding to real events in the history of Sri Lanka are interwoven in the personal tales of pain and suffering. “It is a mistake to expect documentary accuracy from novels and short stories. Fiction exists to reshape human experiences, to amuse, excite, intrigue, challenge, and move the reader” (Brians, 2003, p.6).
The War of 1971 finds expression in the works of both Pakistani as well as Bangladeshi writers. Kamila Shamsie in *Kartography* and Tahmina Anam in her *A Golden Age* have both made this the central event in their works. For the Bangladeshi author Anam, 1971 is a matter of pride and achievement and is shown as such in her novel. Pakistan is the villain, the perpetrator of unspeakable crimes of rape and murder in her country. However, in Shamsie’s story the characters do not know much details about the war, it is an event that happened far away from their land and has no immediate impression on them, leading Raheen in *Kartography* to wonder: “what terrible things we must have done then to remain so silent about it” (Shamsie, 2002, p.270). In her article “Too Soon?: Pakistan and the 1971 War”, Cara Cilano (2010) says that, President Pervez Musharraf is supposed to have gone on record saying, “What happened in ’71 was a disgrace to the nation? Should we remember such disgraces?” (p.ii). This reluctance to remember reflects the official attitude towards the event. Therefore, fiction like Shamsie’s *Kartography* serve to throw light on areas that has been relegated to the dark recesses of history.

The conflict in Afghanistan is presented with gruesome details of amputations, stoning, rape and abduction in Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*. A dystopian war ridden island is the setting of *Heaven’s Edge*. Though the island is unnamed, there is no mistaking that Gunasekera had Sri Lanka in his mind. In Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* we see the discontentment of the people in the Darjeeling hills; pouring out into the streets. Ignored by the Indian mainland they fight for a homeland of their own. Manjushree Thapa also highlights the discontentment in other parts of the Himalayan region where Maoist are fighting their “People’s war”. In the depiction of continuous acts
of violence, the aim of the author is to sensitize the readers to the futility of violence and warfare.

The conflict between cultures lies at the heart of postcolonial literature, but in some writers there is also an awareness of having partly lost their cultural identity. The quest for identity is another theme that is common in many of the novels studied here. Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the quest of a young Princeton graduate to discover himself in the post 9/11 hostile environment. *Cinnamon Garden* also charts the path of self discovery and assertion of feminine identity of Annalukshmi. In Manjushree Thapa’s *Season of Flight*, Prema the protagonist negotiates issues of identity in the diaspora. Shyam Sevadurai’s novels are focused on the struggle to negotiate alternate sexuality in a hostile heteronormative society.

Family, tradition, and the inequities of the caste system are themes that run throughout the narrative in the novels studied. Rohinton Mistry and Nagarkar focus on the conflicts due to caste and class. The fate of the poor and downtrodden, the violence of caste oppression and the inhumanity of poverty is the subject of Rohinton Mistry’s novel *A Fine Balance*. Disillusionment in the aftermath of Independence and the use of power and violence as major repressive forces in a patriarchal society is the subject of novels emerging from India. The reactions and resultant conflicts occupy centre-stage in many novels. The cult of violence becoming more and more prevalent in the society is symptomatic of the conflicts growing deeper.

Fundamentalism can be understood as a stricter way of living and identifying oneself; Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* examines the complexities of moral questions faced by the characters because of the manner in which a character like Kaukab has
chosen to interpret her religion. A similar stance is also chosen by Sohail in *The Good Muslim* by Tahmina Anam. Aslam depicts the violence due to religion but his criticism is not of the religion itself but rather the extremist interpretation that leads to wrong practices. Despite being a book of great humanity and compassion, Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers* is an unflinching portrayal of some of the worst aspects of Pakistani life (Shamsie, 2004, n.pag.). Asked if the West needs more negative images of Pakistan to add to the ones they’ve already got, Aslam replies: “I live in the west. I have a knowledge of how it works, its injustices and subtle repressions, but I also know this other world, and I have to bring news of that, too.” Aslam’s reply reveals his awareness of the responsibility of a writer towards society.

Any kind of change demands that its members go through a struggle. The writers included in this study depict the struggles arising out of the changing dynamics of society. Individuals seem to be caught between the polarities of preservation of certain cherished values and the eagerness to follow a different more challenging path. The clash between tradition and modernity, the option for humanistic concerns in lieu of religious belief are some of the questions examined in these novels.

The novelists of the Indian Subcontinent also present the attitudinal changes in women, and the subsequent feminist stance revealed in their new found self-assertion. The quest and the need to reinvent their identity is depicted as to be of crucial importance to the women of the subcontinent across borders. In spite of their subaltern positions the women in these stories are not without agency. Rehana and Binita in *A Golden Age* and *The Tutor of English* respectively are both widows, but they have not allowed their widowhood to overpower their personal identity. Contrary to conventional
widows who would have allowed herself to depend on the generosity of family for subsistence, Binita chooses to open a tea stall to earn her own livelihood. Rehana builds Shona a facility that allows her to have an income consistent enough to bring back the children she had lost to her brother-in-law and her sister-in-law.

The changing attitude toward marriage is also evident in novels like *Seasons of Flight* and *Cinnamon Gardens*. The protagonists in these novels are young, educated women capable of independent thinking. They refuse to accept the notion that a marriage is a necessity, Annalukshmi, refuses to be tied down in spite of the best efforts of her aunt and her mother. Prema also does not consider marriage as primary in her life even though she has already reached a marriageable age. Annalukshmi is, maybe because of the period to which she belongs, compelled by circumstances to rebel against patriarchal norms, but in the case of Prema, she is not necessarily of rebellious by nature. The women presented in these novels are also interested in exploring their sexuality. They are women aware of their needs and desires and pursue them. Marriage as an institution weighs down heavily on a woman, depriving her of independence through reproduction and domesticity. In Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and Taslima Narin’s *French Lover* we get a glimpse of infidelity. Ajie’s mother and Nili in the respective novels find love outside the boundary of marriage. If Nili is pushed by her oppressive husband to do so, Mrs Chelvaratnam has no excuse to justify her friendship with Daryll. The interesting thing about these instances of infidelity is that it is not followed by an accompanying sense of guilt. This certainly speaks of changing attitudes and new awareness among women of the Indian Subcontinent.
The issue of social identity and cultural roots in the context of migration is taken up as a site of conflict in these novels. Pakistani writers concern to demolish the framing of Muslims in the West and the monolithic image of Muslims as represented by the media is an important aspect of their works. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin (2011) believe that the western media and politicians’ reaction to 9/11 has “thrust a certain type of Orientalist stereotype firmly back into our cinema and television screens, into our news media, and into the mouths of politicians,” (p.3). The works of Nadeem Aslam, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid can be read as attempts to shatter this stereotype by presenting the diversity of the Muslim world, the different ways in which Islam is comprehended by people inhabiting this world.

Exile and its accompanying pain and suffering is another theme found common among these writers. As many of these writers live in the diaspora, their disporic consciousness is visible in their works. The failure of western multiculturalism to embrace immigrants is also explored in novels like The Inheritance of Loss and Maps for Lost Lovers.

A characteristic that most writers emerging from the Indian Subcontinent, irrespective of the country to which they belong is, their pedigree. They tend to belong to affluent, well educated middle class or elite backgrounds. Many of them are educated abroad and have made their homes abroad in Britain, Canada and in the United States of America. They are urban and cosmopolitan in their attitudes. Describing the themes of South Asian writers, Gita Ranjan and Shailja Sharma (2006), in their book, New Cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the US (Asian America) say, “they explore contemporary realities of shifting national boundaries, multiple locations of home,
multiracial and multicultural identities by deftly yoking together the local with the global” (n.pag.).

The present study has portrayed conflict as one of the constants in the diverse and evolving scenario of South Asian or Indian Subcontinental Fiction. Aware as they are of the conflicts, these works participate in an elaboration of new consciousness. Without being too conspicuous these authors have expressed their commitment to the ideals of freedom and justice in the context of the individual self, the family, society, culture and politics. They have use the novel as a medium for a subtle projection of values.

The field of South Asian fiction is too vast to be able to conduct a comprehensive study of the same. The present study has examined limited aspects of few novelists and their select works. This is an area that has great prospects for future research works to be done. A more comprehensive and in-depth study of individual writers can be conducted or works with broader perspectives including various writers can be undertaken. The many commonalities that these novelists share in spite of their differences in terms of geography, cultural and political conditions, religion and language qualify the writers of the Indian Subcontinent to be understood and accepted as a body of literature.

WORKS CITED


